

IN THE CLAIMS:

21. (canceled)

22. (canceled)

23. (currently amended)      The merchandise return system of claim ~~[[22]]~~ 24 further comprising:

one of electronic or non-electronic forms of records attached to returnable units of merchandise during or before order fulfillment wherein the forms facilitate research of information with the association service.

24. (currently amended)      ~~The merchandise return system of claim 21~~

An out-sourced merchandise-return system providing a network of distributed point-of-return associates with the walk-in return business of remote and generally online merchandisers; the system comprising:

a distributed purchasing public of remote merchandisers' merchandise;

a plurality of remote merchandisers transacting sales accompanied in each instance by a form of record thereof, whereby the merchandisers likely desire greater physical distribution among their distributed purchasers of brick-and-mortar centers for sake of offering proximity for walk-in return service;

a network of distributed point-of-return associates providing a network of distributed, physical stores in which to process the walk-in return business of the remote merchandisers;

an association resource providing merchandise-return information services for exchange among the point-return associates over a communications medium; and

an out-sourced merchandise-return program configured such that the point-of-return associates accept the walk-in returns of the merchandisers' merchandise upon authorization received from the merchandise-return information services based on the input of information from the form of record for the merchandise;

whereby said out-sourced merchandise-return system affords the point-of-return associates expanded opportunities to increase public traffic by offering to process returns for the remote merchandisers;

wherein the association resource is a resource for merchandise-return information corresponding to information on original sales transactions by which a given merchandiser fulfilled or caused fulfillment of orders of merchandise; and

wherein the plurality of remote merchandisers deal in a wide variety of differing goods and the distributed community of point-of-return associates generally provide retail mail, parcel and shipping services ~~generally~~ substantially not ~~directly~~ competitive with the goods of the merchandisers.

25. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim ~~[[21]]~~ 24 wherein the association resource and at least some of the distributed community of point-of-return associates are part of a common organization.

26. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim ~~[[21]]~~ 24 wherein the association resource exchanges information over the communications medium with at least some of the plurality of remote merchants.

27. (canceled)

28. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim ~~[[27]]~~ 31 wherein the pertinent return-acceptance criteria are communicated in a message further comprising return fulfillment instructions in cases if the pertinent return-acceptance criteria are met.

29. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim ~~[[27]]~~ 31 wherein:

the association resource is a resource for such information including that corresponding to information on original sales transactions by which a given merchandiser fulfilled or caused fulfillment of orders of merchandise.

30. (previously presented) The merchandise return system of claim 29 further comprising:

one of electronic or non-electronic forms of records attached to returnable units of merchandise during or before order fulfillment wherein the forms facilitate research of information with the association resource.

31. (currently amended) ~~The merchandise return system of claim 27~~

An out-sourced merchandise-return system providing a network of distributed point-of-return associates with the walk-in return business of remote and generally online merchandisers; the system comprising:

a distributed purchasing public of remote merchandisers' merchandise;

a plurality of remote merchandisers that likely desire greater physical distribution among their distributed purchasers of brick-and-mortar centers for sake of offering proximity for walk-in return service;

a network of distributed point-of-return associates providing a network of distributed physical stores in which to handle the walk-in return business of the remote merchandisers;

an association resource providing merchandise-return information services for exchange among the point-return associates over a communications medium and being a resource of information pertaining to the merchandise of the remote merchandisers including pertinent return-acceptance criteria; and

an out-sourced merchandise-return program arranged such that the point-of-return associates accept the walk-in returns of the merchandisers' merchandise if after contact with the merchandise-return information services the pertinent return-acceptance criteria are met;

whereby said out-sourced merchandise-return system affords the point-of-return associates expanded opportunities to increase public traffic by offering to handle returns for the remote merchandisers;

wherein the plurality of remote merchandisers deal in a wide variety of differing goods and the distributed community of point-of-return associates generally provide retail mail, parcel and shipping services generally not directly competitive with the goods of the merchandisers.

32. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim [[27]] 31 wherein said merchandise return system and at least some of the distributed community of point-of-return associates are under common ownership or control.

33. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim [[27]] 31 wherein the association resource exchanges information over the communications medium with at least some of the plurality of remote merchants.

34. (canceled)

35. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim [[34]] 37 wherein the merchandise-return information served by the information resource includes criteria for making either a positive or negative return decision and, in cases of positive return decisions, further comprise return fulfillment instructions.

36. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim [[34]] 37 wherein the merchandise-return information served by the information resource includes criteria for making either a positive or negative return decision and, in cases of positive return decisions, further comprise an award instruction applicable to the party presenting the return merchandise or else another party, which award instruction can be chosen from any of instant credit, credit provisional that the merchandiser certifies the propriety of the return upon a later date or event,

credit honored by a given association of merchants only, a direct or otherwise refund in cash or equivalent, and/or any combinations thereof.

37. (currently amended) ~~The merchandise return system of claim 34 further comprising:~~

An out-sourced merchandise return system providing a network of distributed point-of-return associates with the walk-in return business of remote and generally online merchandisers; the system comprising:

a distributed purchasing public of remote merchandisers' merchandise;

a plurality of remote merchandisers that likely desire greater physical distribution among their distributed purchasers of brick-and-mortar centers for sake of offering proximity for walk-in return service;

a network of distributed point-of-return associates providing a network of distributed physical stores in which to handle the walk-in return business of the remote merchandisers;

a merchandise return information resource, providing an exchange of information with the point-return associates over a communications medium, for serving responses to requests for merchandise return information on merchandise presented for return to the point-of-return associates;

an out-sourced merchandise return program devised such that the point-of-return associates accept the walk-in returns of the merchandisers' merchandise in conformance with the merchandise return information served by the information resource; whereby said out-sourced merchandise return system affords the point-of-return associates expanded opportunities to increase public traffic by offering to handle returns for the remote merchandisers; and

one of electronic or non-electronic forms of records attached to returnable units of merchandise during or before order fulfillment wherein the forms facilitate research of information with the information resource.

38. (previously presented) The merchandise return system of claim 37 wherein the electronic forms of records comprise codes which when scanned decode into a URL address and the request to be processed by the information resource.

39. (previously presented) The merchandise return system of claim 38 wherein the plurality of remote merchandisers deal in a wide variety of differing goods and the distributed community of point-of-return associates generally provide retail mail, parcel and shipping services generally not directly competitive with the goods of the merchandisers.

40. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim ~~[[34]]~~ 37 wherein said merchandise-return information resource and at least some of the distributed community of point-of-return associates are under common ownership or control.